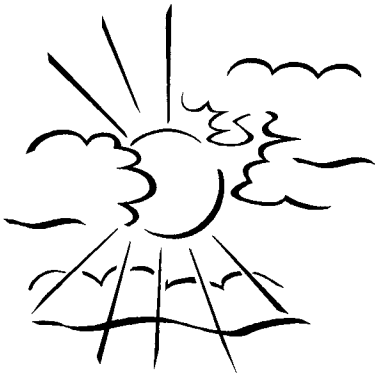


***Department  
of  
Human  
Services***

Prepared by the  
DHS Office of  
Communications  
(517) 373-7394



\*Important story at this spot

# **Articles in Today's Clips**

## **Friday, January 20, 2006**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Michigan business

## **PSC, utilities to aid with heat bills**

### **Thermostats, info will be furnished**

January 20, 2006

BY ALEJANDRO BODIPO-MEMBO  
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has announced that the Michigan Public Service Commission and the state's largest utilities have joined forces to provide thousands of new programmable thermostats and home energy conservation kits to residents.

Up to 5,000 Michigan households will be eligible to receive a free programmable thermostat and help on how to weatherize their home. Using a programmable thermostat can save some households as much as 3% on their monthly heating bill.

About 1,500 low-income residents already receiving weatherization services through the Michigan Department of Human Services will get a free programmable thermostat installed by an expert. In addition, 3,450 Michigan residents will have the opportunity to attend a two-hour home energy conservation workshop and receive a free home energy conservation kit.

The workshops, available to any Michigan resident, will be held in February and March and be administered by area Community Action agencies. Residents can go to the MPSC Web site at [www.michigan.gov/mpsc](http://www.michigan.gov/mpsc) to find the number of a nearby agency or call 800-292-9555 for more information.

*Contact ALEJANDRO BODIPO-MEMBA at 313-222-5008 or [bodipo@freepress.com](mailto:bodipo@freepress.com).*

# **Metro Detroiters seeking insulation left in the cold High demand makes wait for work as long as 8 weeks**

January 20, 2006

Doug Guthrie / The Detroit News

With utility bills going through the roof, efforts to keep expensive household heat from doing the same are being stymied in Metro Detroit by long waits for busy insulation contractors and a shortage of insulation materials.

The wait for professional installation can be as long as eight weeks. And contractors say it's sometimes hard to get supplies such as fiberglass and cellulose insulation.

"The demand is incredible," said George Chrenka, vice president and technical director at Nu-Wool Inc., near Grand Rapids. His factory, which makes cellulose insulation out of recycled newspapers, is working around the clock, seven days a week. Despite the added shifts, Nu-Wool still is weeks behind on meeting orders.

The shortage of fiberglass batting and cellulose insulation is due to a combination of circumstances. Fiberglass insulation factories have been operating at maximum output to meet demand and are unable to increase production. Owens-Corning, the nation's largest producer of fiberglass insulation, is in bankruptcy. No upgrades have been made in production capacity for years.

Now, shocking utility bills are causing a run on insulation just when suppliers are involved in Gulf Coast rebuilding efforts.

Natural gas bills have jumped an average of 46 percent in Michigan since last year. The average homeowner's heating bill was expected to go from \$128 to \$187 monthly this winter. Natural gas price hikes have been attributed to various factors, including supply problems attributed to the summer's devastating Gulf Coast hurricanes.

"We are hearing a lot of stories and complaints about supply," said Michael Kwart, executive vice president of the Insulation Contractors Association of America. He said a couple of major insulation factories closed this summer for renovation, to boost production later.

John Flumerfelt, president and owner of Sunshine Insulation Co. of Redford, which specializes in blowing cellulose insulation into the walls and attics of older homes, has a two-month waiting list for his services.

"The biggest complaint is we can't get to the customers fast enough," Flumerfelt said.

Applegate, a nationwide cellulose insulation manufacturer headquartered in Webberville, near Lansing, has workers on extra shifts to keep pace with demand. The company also is for the first time filling bags of the stuff for retail sales in Lowe's home improvement stores. Lowe's had anticipated trouble and made the deal to keep shelves stocked this season.

"The minds of a lot of homeowners are focused on the high cost of energy. It's about sticker shock from the first bills of the season," said Karen Cobb, a spokeswoman for Lowe's Companies Inc. in Mooresville, N.C. "We are seeing more demand for home weatherization products."

In the fall, Bruce Shively, owner of Metropolitan Windows & Improvement in Dearborn, said other home improvement stores were keeping sign-up lists for anticipated delivery of delayed insulation shipments.

"For a while this fall, you had to put a name in for insulation," said Shively, who added that he can recall the energy crisis of the late 1970s, and believes homeowners seem more desperate now. "People are almost panicked," he said. "There are still some price shoppers, but most are just asking us how soon instead of how much."

Shively said most homes in Detroit and its inner-ring suburbs were built in the 1940s and 1950s and have little or no insulation. He expects delivery soon of another insulation installing machine to help speed up his service. "Homes built in the 1970s are R11 rated in the ceilings and now the Department of Energy is recommending R45 and 48 for our region," Shively said.

Matthew Adam, marketing director for Applegate, said the company has six plants nationwide working overtime to fill need.

"We anticipated this coming," Adam said. . "

Mabel Kenyon had additional insulation added this fall to the attic of her three-bedroom brick bungalow in Redford. Her combined heat and electric bill still is 19 percent higher this year, but far less than the statewide natural gas average increase of about 45 percent. Her December bill was \$200, compared with \$168 last year. She encouraged her adult son and daughter to also have additional insulation installed in their homes too. Her son had a long wait, getting insulation added to his home's attic last week.

"My real measure is that it's just warmer in my house," Kenyon said.

As further proof of citizen concern, Michigan Public Service Commission Chairman J. Peter Lark announced Thursday that just a day and a half after the unveiling of the "Save Energy with Ease" program, all energy conservation workshops offered statewide have been filled to capacity.

On Tuesday, Gov. Jennifer Granholm and utility companies offered thousands of free programmable thermostats, home energy conservation kits and home energy conservation education to Michigan residents.

*You can reach Doug Guthrie at (734) 462-2674 or [dguthrie@detnews.com](mailto:dguthrie@detnews.com).*

January 19, 2006

## **HEATING MONEY FIRES UP B.S.F. DEBATE**

A proposal to boost the amount of money set aside to assist low income persons pay for their home heating bills became the focus of legislation enacted to set aside funds in the Budget Stabilization Fund.

On a 23-13 vote (with Senate Minority Floor Leader Sen. Mark Schauer (D-Battle Creek) the only Democrat to vote with a solid Republican majority) the Senate approved the bill that would allocate \$116.3 million to the Budget Stabilization Fund. The money is the reserves following the 2004-05 fiscal year, less an anticipated \$104 million to pay for Single Business Tax cuts enacted last year.

SB 956 faces an uncertain future, even if it is approved, as expected, by the House. State Budget Director Mary Lannoye is already on record saying the state is potentially "several hundred million" short for the 2006-07 fiscal year and cannot afford to hold back available revenues.

That same point was made Wednesday before the Senate Appropriations Committee and was the reason why committee Democrats opposed the measure.

But what fired debate before the full Senate was an amendment to take half the amount, \$58.15 million and allocate that to help pay heating costs for the low income. Senate members got to the point where they outlined what their home heating bills totaled, and when several Detroit area members said their bills increased by as much as \$500 in a single month Republicans challenged that.

"I want to see those bills," said Sen. Shirley Johnson (R-Troy), as Democrats shouted over they would bring them to her. Bills that high must be for "a mansion with no insulation."

Already added to the bill on Wednesday was \$21 million in restricted funds to help low income residents pay their heating bills.

Sen. Deborah Cherry (D-Burton) moved to boost that \$21 million by more than \$58 million, saying the additional funds would not be enough to cover the need.

But Ms. Johnson said the \$21 million was a proposal that Governor Jennifer Granholm made, and Republicans were willing to support it. "The governor is fully aware of the need in Detroit," Ms. Johnson said to Democrats. "She needs Detroit more than she needs you."

The proposal failed on an 18-19 vote as Sen. Laura Toy (R-Livonia), Sen. Bruce Patterson (R-Canton) and Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom (R-Norton Shores) voted for the proposal.

Michigan Report

January 19, 2006

## **DEMAND FILLS ENERGY** **WORKSHOPS/GRABS THERMOSTATS**

Just two days after energy saving workshops and the chance to acquire a new energy-saving thermostat was offered by the state, an unprecedented demand means all spaces in the workshops are filled and the thermostats spoken for.

Peter Lark, Public Service Commission chair, said Thursday the commission had gotten unprecedented response after he, Governor Jennifer Granholm and officials of a number of utilities announced the programs to help consumers save energy.

The program will see that 1,500 low-income residents already getting weatherization services receive a free programmable thermostat installed by an expert. Another 3,420 residents will get an energy conservation kit that includes one of the thermostats after attending a two-hour energy conservation workshop.

On Wednesday, the PSC received more than 2,000 calls about the program, the most received in one day on any subject by the agency.

# Laws to protect students will be expensive

## Rules bar sex offenders from schools

January 20, 2006

BY LORI HIGGINS  
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

Strict new laws aimed at protecting children and ridding schools of sex offenders come at a price.

School districts, or their employees, will be saddled with the cost of the fingerprinting and background checks now required of any school or day care employee. Some districts say they have no idea how they're going to afford it.

Under the rules, which went into effect Jan. 1, employees convicted of sex crimes are barred from working in schools or day care facilities and those with other felony convictions must get approval from their bosses to keep their jobs.

"The intent is to keep our kids safe, and we all agree that is extremely important. But this is very far-reaching," said Lori Ekelman, director of human resources for Rochester Community Schools.

A big issue is who will pay and how much it will cost schools. The laws are so new, there are no estimates yet of the overall price tag.

But background checks will cost a district roughly \$54 per employee. Fingerprinting could run an additional \$16. For the state's largest district -- Detroit, which does its own fingerprinting -- the checks alone for 19,000 employees could add up to \$1 million.

Previously, fingerprinting and background checks for all teachers and administrators were required before being hired, and typically districts had the potential employees cover the cost. But those records were never kept. And now current employees will have to be rechecked.

"There are new employees saying, 'Look, I just paid \$70 to have my fingerprints taken just six months ago, now I'm going to have to pay again?' That bothers some folks," said Donald Crockett, an advanced placement biology teacher who also is head of the Novi Education Association.

Part of the wide reach of the law is that it requires checks of not just all school employees, but of anyone contracted to work regularly and continuously in schools.

### **Catching sex offenders**

A 2005 state audit found 222 employees with criminal records working in schools, but only 44 of those workers' files contained information from their background checks or a description of their criminal charges, according to a legislative analysis. Five of those with records were sex offenders while the others had been convicted of robbery, assault, shoplifting or alcohol-related offenses.

Files of the remaining 178 employees were incomplete. In part, the audit led to the legislation, which toughens screenings and is in line with other states seeking to make schools safer for kids. In recent years, similar laws have been enacted or strengthened in Illinois, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas and Kentucky.

Lisa Soronen, a staff attorney with the National School Boards Association, said checks are important, but they won't weed out all the bad people working in schools. Many sex offenders are never convicted, she said.

"This can't be used to lull people into thinking everything is OK," Soronen said.

Just as important is training teachers and administrators to look for signs of trouble, Soronen said.

Nancy Eggenberger, a parent of three in the Plymouth-Canton schools, said the background checks might be a good idea, but she's worried about the possibility that they won't catch everyone, and about the cost.

"It's just one more thing we have to pay for that the Legislature has decided is important," Eggenberger said.

Critics have complained that the laws represent an unfunded mandate at a time when many school districts already are cash-strapped.

"Doing criminal checks for anyone who's working around children is a good idea. The frustration is it's not backed by the finances," said Bill Harrison, superintendent of the Madison School District in Madison Heights.

State Rep. Brian Palmer, R-Romeo, said the argument about an unfunded mandate is not an issue because schools can require employees and potential employees to pay for the fingerprinting and background checks.

"It boils down to what are the priorities. Student safety is the priority," said Palmer, one of the biggest advocates of the new laws.

School districts could cover the costs themselves, but many can't afford to take on an added expense and are likely to try negotiating with their unions to have employees -- even those who have already paid for fingerprinting and other background checks -- foot the bill.

"It's part of the price, I guess, of being put into an entrusted position, probably the most entrusting profession anyone could be put in, which is constant contact with children on a daily, hourly basis," Palmer said.

### **Current employees affected**

Michigan school districts and day care centers must have current employees fingerprinted and, by July 1, 2008, must request criminal background checks through the Michigan State Police and the FBI.

Once the fingerprints are done, they go to the State Police, which will conduct a state check and then forward the prints to the FBI for a federal background check, said Tim Bolles, identification and criminal history section manager for the State Police.

If the checks turn up any hits from the state, school districts will be immediately notified. Federal hits will go directly to the Michigan Department of Education.

School districts have a few options when it comes to getting their employees fingerprinted. They can work with a company the state contracts with or purchase a fingerprinting device themselves or in partnership with other districts. The devices cost between \$10,000 to \$12,000.

The Michigan Department of Education is responsible for ensuring districts meet the July 2008 deadline.

### **Fears of a witch hunt**

Few question the need to ban those who've been convicted of sex crimes from working among children. But the law's requirement that school superintendents and school boards approve the continued employment of anyone convicted of a felony or certain misdemeanors such as domestic assault is worrisome to many.



"It feels almost like a witch hunt," said Margaret Trimer-Hartley, spokeswoman for the Michigan Education Association, the state's largest teachers union.  
Still, Trimer-Hartley doesn't expect this to be an issue for a large number of school employees.  
"We know a vast majority of Michigan school employees have never been convicted or accused of a crime."

#### Offenses

- New rules designed to protect children in schools and day care centers bar employment of people who have been convicted of an attempt or conspiracy to commit the following offenses:  
**Accosting, enticing or soliciting a child** younger than 16 for immoral purposes.  
**Involvement in child sexually abusive activity** or possession of such materials.  
**A third or subsequent offense** of indecent or obscene conduct or exposure in a public place.  
**Pandering** for purposes of prostitution.  
**Criminal sexual conduct** or assault with intent to commit criminal sexual conduct.  
**An offense** committed by a person who was, at the time of the offense, a sexually delinquent person.  
Several apply only if a victim is younger than 18, including:  
**Sodomy**  
**Gross indecency**  
**Kidnapping**  
**Soliciting, accosting or inviting** another person to commit prostitution or an immoral act  
**Any other violation** of state or local law that constitutes a sexual offense  
*Lori Higgins*

#### Requirements

- **Fingerprinting and background checks** for all school employees and anyone contracted to work regularly and continuously in a school.  
**A ban on anyone convicted** of any of the offenses included in the Sex Offender Registration Act from working in schools or day care centers.  
**Criminal checks** for those applying for or renewing a certificate of registration to operate a family day care home or group day care home, child-care center or day center.  
**Criminal checks** on anyone older than 18 residing in the home of a family day care home or group day care home when an application is filed to operate the center.  
**A ban on sex offenders** from working or loitering within 1,000 feet of school property.  
**Notification** from school employees charged with certain crimes within three working days.  
*Lori Higgins*

#### List of sex offenders

To view Michigan's list of registered sex offenders, go to [www.mipsor.state.mi.us/](http://www.mipsor.state.mi.us/)

# Mother pleads guilty to assault of 9-year-old son

Friday, January 20, 2006

lturner@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8564

A woman who told police something just ``snapped" when she tried to smother her son after an argument about snowpants has pleaded guilty to a lesser charge.

Originally charged with attempted murder, Amy Soule, 32, of Portage, pleaded guilty earlier this month to the lesser crime of assault with intent to commit great bodily harm, said her attorney, Jessie Olson.

The charge carries up to 10 years in prison, but it is unlikely she will be sent there, Olson said.

``Nobody seems to think she deserves prison, even the victim," Olson said. ``The judge wants to see how she's doing in counseling."

The Dec. 5th incident occurred at Soule's mother's house in Paw Paw Township.

Olson is to be sentenced Feb. 6 by Van Buren County Circuit Judge William C. Buhl.

# Former day-care worker to stand trial

Friday, January 20, 2006

By John Tunison  
The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- Barely big enough to speak into a court microphone, a 7-year-old girl with blonde locks described Thursday how a worker at a Holland day care molested her twice in a classroom. "He was doing stuff that I did not want him to do," the girl said in a tiny voice, sitting low in a witness stand chair.

The first-grader's simplistic, yet critical testimony provided key evidence in convincing a judge to order Jason Jeffrey Kortman, 21, to stand trial on two counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Kortman initially waived a probable cause hearing in September on hopes of taking advantage of a possible plea agreement, but the deal fell through. He then was given the chance to have the hearing.

Kortman is accused of molesting the girl, then 6, at the Lakeshore Little People's Place day care in South Side Christian School, 913 Pine Ave. Holland police said he inappropriately touched the girl several times over a four-month period ending in August.

Detectives do not believe any other child was molested.

Lakeshore Little People's Place leases space at the school, but is otherwise not affiliated with Holland Christian Schools.

The girl testified that Kortman, whom she called "Mr. Jason," touched her on two separate occasions as she sat on his lap in a classroom with about 10 other children. The children, most sitting on bean-bag chairs or couches, were watching a movie on a television and no other adults were in the room, she said.

"He asked me if he could rub a spot I did not want him to," she said. "I said no, but he did it anyway.

"It made me feel uncomfortable," she said.

The girl said Kortman unzipped her pants and placed his hand on her "private parts." She also testified that Kortman gave her back rubs at other times.

The incidents came to light when the girl told her sister and her father overheard.

The day care placed Kortman on leave as soon as the allegations surfaced and fired him after his arrest.

Defense attorney Joe Legatz questioned whether the girl had been touched inappropriately at all. While answering his questions, the girl provided conflicting testimony about where she was touched. She said Kortman's hands went no further than her waist.

Testimony from Holland police Detective John DeYoung, though, backed up the girl's story. DeYoung, who interviewed Kortman twice in late August, said Kortman admitted to wrongdoing.

"He told us he screwed up, that he crossed the line and he wanted help from us, that he wanted counseling and not prison," DeYoung said.

In fact, DeYoung said Kortman estimated he touched the girl inappropriately six or seven times and thought of her "as you would think of a girl in a bar."

Outside the courtroom, Kortman's parents defended him. They believe he is wrongly accused and say they strongly believe in him.

Police earlier said they did not believe Lakeshore Little People's Place violated any day-care licensing rules. Kortman has no prior record.

# **Man charged with sex with 14-year-old**

Petoskey News Review

*Thursday, January 19, 2006 3:05 PM EST*

Police have arrested an Emmet County man on charges of criminal sexual conduct involving a 14-year-old girl.

Emmet County Sheriff Pete Wallin said deputies from his office arrested John Furgeson, 20, on the charges Monday.

According to police the alleged incident took place on Jan. 5 in Littlefield Township.

Police became involved in the case when the girl reported the incident to school officials, Wallin said.

Furgeson remains lodged in the Emmet County Jail in lieu of a \$50,000 cash or surety bond.

He was arraigned on the charges today, Thursday, and is scheduled to face a preliminary examination at 3 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 1.

# Baby sale figure guilty

Friday, January 20, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

CORBIN, KY. --

A 22-year Kentucky man was convicted Thursday in a scheme to sell a baby to a Michigan woman for \$5,000. Kenneth Couch is expected to face a two-year prison sentence after a one-day trial that ended with a jury finding him guilty, said Whitley County Commonwealth Attorney Allen Trimble. He and his girlfriend, Jessica Cornett, 18, were arrested last year after selling her 10-month-old daughter to Kimberly Brick, 30, of Chase in Lake County. Brick was sentenced to probation. Cornett, who was sentenced to two years in prison, testified Thursday that Couch came up with the idea, Trimble said.

# **Man Convicted of Selling Girlfriend's Baby to Michigan Woman**

Carin Windom

Created: 1/20/2006 8:48:10 AM

Updated: 1/20/2006 8:58:05 AM

Williamsburg, Kentucky - A man who took part in selling a baby to a Michigan woman will be sentenced in March.

Kenneth Couch was convicted as being an accomplice for selling his girlfriend's baby to a woman in Baldwin, Michigan. Couch and Jessica Cornett sold a ten-month-old baby girl for five thousand dollars. Cornett was sentenced to a 2-year prison term.

The woman who bought the child also faced charges. Kimberly Brick pleaded guilty and was sentenced to probation, but will not serve any time.

FAX: DHS Communications

1-20-06

Times Indicator - Wednesday - January 18, 2006

# Arrests halt two meth labs

By Micki Hilbrand

Members of the Central Michigan Enforcement Team conducted a search of two homes in Newaygo on Sunday, arresting a man and woman for maintaining a methamphetamine laboratory.

The couple is awaiting arraignment in 78th District Court. When officers found three children in the home, they called local Child Protective Services officials to place the children in protective custody.

Det. Sgt. Joel Abendroth of CMET said that, when officers arrived at the residence, they saw an 18-year-old male fleeing the area on foot. When officers caught him, they arrested him on a marijuana possession charge.

At a second home, a resident was arrested for

a driving offense and a charge of felony sex offender registry violation. CMET officers found a quantity of controlled substances and firearms there.

Abendroth said that it was the third methamphetamine lab to get raided in the new year.

In an unrelated case on Jan. 5, CMET and Fremont Police officers arrested four local residents on meth-related charges.

Investigators acted on a tip from a local merchant who noticed customers buying a suspicious amount of material used in methamphetamine production.

When officers stopped the suspects' vehicle, they found what they described as meth manufacturing components in the vehicle.

"While possession of some of these items alone does not constitute a crime, the combination of things together can," said Abendroth. The four suspects were arrested and charged with possession of methamphetamine lab components, a 20-year felony.

CMET continued the investigation and, according to Abendroth, found and dismantled a meth lab that was directly linked to the four arrested suspects. It was located inside a school bus parked in Muskegon County. The resident of the bus was arrested as a suspected "meth cook."

The names of the suspects were being withheld at press time because the investi-

gation was still in progress.

"This investigation would not have been possible without the cooperation of local merchants," said Abendroth. "Subjects who manufacture methamphetamine can purchase many of the chemicals, cold pills and other things required in the manufacturing process from local stores and pharmacies."

Abendroth said that through education, local merchants can learn to identify the chemicals and combination of different items used in the manufacturing process and alert police when they suspect that dangerous meth production is happening.

"Meth is extremely addictive, especially when smoked," said Abendroth.

Statewide, in 2004, more than 200 meth labs were dismantled, Abendroth said. CMET alone investigated more than a dozen.

CMET covers an area that includes the counties of Newaygo, Montcalm, Ionia and Mecosta. Abendroth said that he encourages anyone with information about suspected meth production or other illegal drug activity to contact CMET at 1-800-342-0406 or call Silent Observer at 652-1121.

Along with the Fremont Police Department, CMET was assisted by the Newaygo County Sheriff's Department, Newaygo Police Department, Michigan State Police from the Newaygo Post and Newaygo County Child Protective Services.



# Man, 39, gets prison for grisly attack on his wife

Wednesday, January 20, 2006

By John S. Hausman

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

William Lee Lathrop literally twisted the knife in his wife's abdomen in the course of stabbing her 11 times, according to testimony at his attempted-murder trial.

Then, from jail, he figuratively did the same thing -- calling Amy Lee Lathrop and the couple's two teenage daughters, over and over, in persistent attempts to persuade them to talk prosecutors into a plea bargain that would free him in a few years.

The results came this morning at William Lathrop's sentencing for assault with attempt to murder, the crime a jury convicted him of last month.

Citing both factors, 14th Circuit Judge Timothy G. Hicks exceeded state sentencing guidelines to order Lathrop to prison for 20 to 35 years. The guidelines had called for a minimum sentence of, at most, 17-1/2 years.

Agreeing with arguments of the Muskegon County Prosecutor's Office, the judge told the defendant his most important reason for exceeding the guidelines "is the way that you tried after your incarceration here to use your children ... to manipulate them to get the goal you sought."

Audio tapes played at Lathrop's trial revealed the defendant repeatedly using phone calls to his wife and daughters to try to get them to help him win a deal under which he would plead to "assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder," a felony punishable by a maximum of 10 years in prison. Attempted murder, the crime with which he was charged and convicted, is a potential life felony.

Hicks said he was influenced by the "manipulation," by the effect of the stabbing on the couple's children -- who witnessed it -- and by what he called "one of the most chilling bits of testimony I've ever heard": that at one point Lathrop moved the knife around in his wife's abdomen, like "a hunter might do when he means to kill his prey," the judge said.

The law allows judges to go outside sentencing guidelines if they state "substantial and compelling reasons" to do so.

Senior Assistant Prosecutor Dale J. Hilson strongly urged an above-guideline sentence of 25 years to life.

Hilson cited how close Amy Lathrop came to being killed, calling her stabbing "as close as you can get to an actual homicide" without death resulting. He noted that doctors had testified that she was repeatedly stabbed in what they called the "kill zone," in her chest and midsection. He also stressed Lathrop's post-arrest calls to his family.

Most important, Hilson argued, was to "send a message to this community that there is absolutely no excuse for grabbing a dangerous weapon like a knife" and trying to kill someone, no matter how upset one might be.

Lathrop, 39, who testified in his own defense, admitted stabbing Amy Lathrop with a serrated steak knife in a rage, but claimed he couldn't remember doing it and didn't intend to kill her.

The attack happened the afternoon of June 26 in the Lathrops' home at 1088 Parkway after an argument. According to testimony, Bill Lathrop punched Amy Lathrop repeatedly in the face as the two stood near her truck in the driveway, then dragged her by her hair into the house, where he repeatedly punched and then stabbed her as she lay on the floor. He used a steak knife with a broken-off tip that he grabbed off a table, according to testimony.

Their 16-year-old daughter tried to stop him while their 12-year-old daughter ran across the street to her grandparents' home for help, Amy Lathrop testified. Finally, after stabbing her many times, he stopped and said, "I can't believe I did this," then walked out and left her lying there without calling for aid, according to testimony.

Testimony described a stormy marriage with many arguments, especially over money. Amy Lathrop described her husband as a controlling man who had threatened to kill her many times over 19 years of marriage.

Amy Lathrop had moved out of their home a few days before the knife attack. Bill Lathrop repeatedly had asked her to come back.

The day of the attack, she showed up at their house around 5 p.m. to take their children to the beach. Lathrop attacked his wife after he learned she had been staying with another man, according to testimony.

Muskegon County Sheriff's deputies were called to the home about 5:30 p.m. They found the 36-year-old woman bleeding from numerous wounds.

She was taken to a local hospital and was initially listed in critical condition. She was released about four days after the attack.

# Teen set fire to home, police say

Friday, January 20, 2006

rhall@kalamazoogazette.com 388-7784

A 15-year-old Plainwell girl is facing arson and attempted murder charges in connection with a fire early Thursday that heavily damaged the house she shared with her mother, authorities said. The fire, which was reported to the Plainwell Department of Public Safety just after midnight, gutted more than half of the house at 109 Walnut Woods Court and caused between \$75,000 and \$100,000 in damage, said Bill Bomar, director of the public-safety department.

The teen, who is being held at the Allegan County Youth Facility, was arrested at the scene Thursday and has been charged with burning of a dwelling and attempted murder, Bomar said. It was unclear this morning why the girl set fire to the house. The teen and her mother, who were the only occupants of the residence, made it out of the house safely, authorities said.

Detective David Rantz said the girl's mother, who has not been identified, was alerted by a smoke detector in the house, but did suffer slight smoke inhalation.

Firefighters from Gun Plain Township and Plainwell battled the blaze for nearly two-and-a-half hours before bringing it under control, Bomar said. Fires were started in multiple bedrooms of the house to ignite the blaze, he said.

Anyone with information about the blaze can call the Plainwell Department of Public Safety at (269) 685-9858.

Letters to the editor

The Detroit Free Press

FROM OUR READERS: **After foster care, unmet needs**

January 20, 2006

Rochelle Riley, in her Jan. 11 column ("Aging out, but still in need"), was so right when she stated that we can no longer afford not to care. Her column put in the public's radar system the issue of children aging out of the abuse and neglect system.

We in the child welfare system see the faces of these young adults every day. Our Youth in Transition program offers live testimony of these youngsters' limited ability to live on their own. Teenagers represent an estimated 30% of the abused and neglected population nationwide. The majority of these children experience multiple placements before they exit the system. The vast majority of these young adults are discharged from the system without family support, meaningful relationships or the skills to be on their own.

When you add these young adults' traumatic experiences of abuse and neglect to the normal developmental challenges of making it on their own at the age of 18, it is impossible to miss the daunting challenge they face. Michigan, under the leadership of Justice Maura Corrigan, is beginning to address this issue but much more needs to be done.

**Cristina Peixoto**

*Director of Child Welfare Services*

*St. Francis Family Center*

*Catholic Social Services of Oakland County*

**Teens with special needs**

Thank you for Rochelle Riley's Jan. 11 column. This is a primary focus of Lutheran Social Services of Michigan's foster care programs. On an average day, LSSM has nearly 800 children in foster care programs in seven offices across the state. Our greatest need is for homes for teens, who have urgent concerns that must be addressed within a short time.

LSSM recently received a statewide contract for the Education & Training Voucher program for youths. This federal and state program provides financial support for youths aging out of foster care, so they can pay for continuing education and training that moves them toward a successful career and stable adulthood. Both current and former foster youths may be eligible for the program.

**Don Austin**

*Vice President, Services for Children and Families*

*Lutheran Social Services of Michigan*

# Author says adoption brings gains and losses

Friday, January 20, 2006

By Julie Smith  
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS TOWNSHIP -- Adopting a child can complete a family and bring wonderment to new parents.

It also is a process based on loss, said author Sherrie Eldridge, presenting tips for adoptive parents Thursday at Sunshine Church in an event sponsored by Bethany Christian Services. It is important to help parents understand the loss their children sometimes may feel, so they can help them grieve and lead emotionally healthy lives, she said. For adoptees, there is the loss of the birth family and a sense of belonging. For parents, there can be a loss of a dream of having a biological child.

"To deny this loss is to deny the emotional reality of everybody involved," Eldridge said. As an example, she used her life experience as an adoptee: perfect on the outside, but struggling with an eating disorder, promiscuity and stealing as a teen, to eventually gaining a better understanding of her adoptive parents' role in her life and the gratitude she feels toward them. "If you're a parent that's discouraged tonight, keep your eye on the big picture," she told the crowd.

From her 1999 book, "Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew," Eldridge shared some insights for parents whose children may not be able to verbalize what they need.

"I suffered a profound loss before I was adopted and you are not responsible."

In comparing adoption loss to a death in the family or divorce, Eldridge said there are no societal grief responses available to adoptees. There is no funeral or acknowledgment of loss and many don't like to talk about it, she said. But for adoptees, the lack of understanding often manifests itself in feelings of confusion.

"I need to know that God will help me grow through adoption grief."

Eldridge suggested allowing children to hear from other adoptees through a support group or other types of meetings.

"Expose them to the stories of other adoptees," she said.

# **Burlington man arrested, faces aggravated stalking charges**

Coldwater Daily Reporter

January 20, 2006

By Don Reid/Staff Writer

COLDWATER — Officers from the Coldwater Police Department (CPD) arrested Edward Shearer on Sunday, after he allegedly threatened to kill a former girlfriend, and have charged him with aggravated stalking and possession of a weapon by a convicted felon.

Shearer, 34, of Burlington, is being held on a \$100,000, cash or surety, bond on the charges with a preliminary exam set for Jan. 30.

According to court records, Shearer, who once was known by the name of Edward Parker, called Anita Holland and told her he would kill her. She recorded the calls — one of which included the sound of him clicking the chamber of a gun over the phone.

**TAYLOR**

## **Head Start parents eligible for free food**

City officials say parents of children in the Taylor Head Start program are now eligible for free food during distribution at the Head Start site at Eureka Dale Elementary School, 14616 Duncan. The program debuts Tuesday and is a partnership between Head Start and Taylor Connection, a service of the city's Community Development Department. For information, call (734) 785-7701.

# Unionizing child care workers applauded

Gov. Tom Vilsack has authorized providers to belong to a union.

By JENNIFER JACOBS  
REGISTER STAFF WRITER/DesMoinesRegister

**January 18, 2006**

Child care provider Laurie Aguirre asks herself: "Am I going to stay open this year, or am I going to close down and find a job with health insurance?"

Aguirre said she hopes that unionizing child care workers will lead to improvements that will make it easier to run her small business in Des Moines, where she cares for eight children at night and four in daytime.

Gov. Tom Vilsack cleared the way for home-based child care providers to join a labor union by signing two executive orders late Monday evening.

"I think it's great," said Aguirre, who hopes a union will keep her updated on state policies, persuade legislators to increase state subsidy rates, and advocate for group health care benefits.

If more child care providers like Aguirre stay open and eventually receive more state support or benefits, it will mean more choices for parents and potentially higher-quality care for children, providers say.

The governor's move obligates the state to meet with union representatives.

On Tuesday, the two unions competing to represent Iowa child care providers tried to prove they have the support of the majority of registered providers.

Majority status will be based on signed authorization cards. Supporters of the Service Employees International Union's Local 199 and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees' Child Care Providers Together have knocked on doors for a year trying to persuade providers to sign with their union.

An independent mediator, Iowa Mediation Service Inc. of West Des



Moines, began reviewing the cards Tuesday.

Vilsack's executive orders will allow a union to advocate for child care workers, but the union will not be an official state collective bargaining unit recognized by the Public Employees Relations Board, said Gary Dickey, the governor's legal adviser.

"Now, if they have issues with the DHS . . . instead of having 6,000 people calling to get changes, they have a representative to do that," Dickey said.

The governor's two executive orders were nearly identical, except that one authorizes a representative for Iowa's 6,000 registered child care providers and the other a representative for an estimated 7,000 nonregistered providers. Both orders say the director of the Iowa Department of Human Services, or his or her designee, will represent the state.

Raising the subsidy the state pays child care providers who care for low-income children is just one issue providers said they're passionate about.

Of the 12 children Aguirre cares for, only one parent pays out of pocket. The rest of her income is from subsidies, which range from \$20 for older children to \$22.50 for infants for a full day of care.

Only part of Iowa's 6,000 registered child care providers get state subsidies. In December, 1,988 registered home-based providers and 500 licensed centers received some reimbursement. A total of 3,134 nonregistered providers were paid a subsidy, a \$5.3 million total statewide for the month.

The subsidy rates are set by the Legislature. The current rates are based on 75 percent of market rates from a 2002 survey. The DHS is proposing that a 2004 market survey be used instead, which would cost the state about \$3.4 million more a year, DHS spokesman Roger Munns said.

Providers who don't get subsidies said they want a voice in child care policies on safety, training, record-keeping, nutrition, child abuse reporting and other issues.

# Drug firms unite to create single-pill AIDS treatment

By JUSTIN GILLIS  
*Washington Post*

Two drug companies say they've put aside commercial rivalry to achieve a goal that seemed out of reach for 20 years: a single-pill, once-a-day AIDS treatment.

The pill is to contain a regimen of three drugs available on pharmacy shelves and shown to be effective in multiple studies, including one that came out Thursday in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Barring last-minute problems in formulating the pill, doctors expect it to be FDA-approved by the end of the year.

If that happened, it would be a milestone in the development of treatments for the human immunodeficiency virus, which causes AIDS. The virus has infected 1.1 million people in the United States and more than 40 million around the world.

The Food and Drug Administration readily blesses new, more convenient formulations of previously licensed drugs, and approval of the new pill, though it will take several more months, is expected to be routine.

"I think it's a huge thing these companies are going to do," said

Nelson Vergel, an AIDS treatment activist in Houston. "If they give it at the right price to developing countries, it's going to become the

main treatment in the world."

The companies involved are Gil-lead Sciences Inc. and Bristol-Myers Squibb Co.

# County gives boost to United Way effort

By JOHN EBY / Dowagiac Daily News

*Friday, January 20, 2006 10:13 AM EST*

CASSOPOLIS - The Board of Commissioners on Thursday endorsed a February United Way campaign among Cass County employees coordinated by Treasurer Linda Irwin.

Such a campaign "offers them an opportunity, if they choose, to make a contribution to the campaign so we can raise the dollars needed in this county," said Sharon Polfus, development director for United Way of Southwest Michigan in Berrien County.

"Currently we're at about \$45,000" of a \$100,000 campaign goal. "We have a ways to go," she said. "Without campaigns with your organization and others we will not be able to raise the money that is needed by these agencies. Dollars that we raise here in Cass County will stay in Cass County to help local people. I'm here as just a support to the Cass County volunteers. If there's a staff meeting already in place, we ask to come in for the first five minutes to explain what this is. Sometimes I bring agencies with me to share a little bit about what they do."

Polfus, who has worked for United Way for 24 years, told commissioners that Cass County volunteers approached United Way of Southwest Michigan last year as their "limited resources got to a point where they felt they were not able to effectively run a United Way campaign here in the county. The agencies that are here in this county depend heavily on United Way funding, so I started meeting with people here in the community back in late October, going to companies and organizations and explaining this partnership that has been formed with Cass County United Way."

Cass County United Way is based in Dowagiac at 205 S. Front St. (782-5659; fax, 269/925-1590; Benton Harbor phone, 269/925-7772).

Steve Lehman, director of Woodlands Addiction Center, is chairing the \$100,000 campaign. Joy Decker of Cassopolis chairs the board.

Agencies Cass County United Way helps fund include American Red Cross (Kalamazoo chapter), Boy Scouts of America's LaSalle Council, Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Council on Aging, Hospice, Child and Family Services/The Link Crisis Intervention Center, Disability Resource Center, Domestic Assault Shelter, Girl Scouts of Singing Sands Council, Habitat for Humanity, Legal Aid of Western Michigan, Michigan State Extension (Building Strong Families and 4-H leaders), St. Vincent dePaul, The Salvation Army/CURE, Volunteer Center of Southwest Michigan and Woodlands Addiction Center.

"I know these are things that are important to the people of Cass County," Polfus said. "I've been working with companies and organizations to run employee campaigns."

"I move that we give our blessings to this program," said Commissioner Johnie Rodebush, D-Niles. "I'd be happy to pledge some of the tax dollars out of each of my paychecks to give back."

Cass County has been part of past United Way campaigns.

Judge Susan Dobrich, who led the effort in 1994-95, commented, "A lot of Cass County agencies really benefit. I certainly support it and would ask you to all support it."

# **\$1 million donation will help United Way's administrative fund**

Friday, January 20, 2006

By Paul R. Kopenkoskey  
The Grand Rapids Press

HASTINGS -- Barry County United Way had a million reasons for celebrating the finale of its annual fund drive Thursday.

Local benefactor Richard Gross donated \$1 million toward the Hastings-based United Way's administrative fund. The donation came in honor of his mother, Florence Tyden Gross, who founded the local charity 70 years ago.

The donation, announced at Barry County United Way's campaign victory celebration, enables the agency to reduce its administrative overhead by 8 percent, said Lani Forbes, its executive director.

"That will mean more dollars will go toward the agencies who receive our funds," Forbes said. The endowment will be independently administered by the Barry County Community Foundation, which Gross helped establish in the late 1990s.

For years, Gross, a retired president and chairman of fire protection sprinkler-manufacturer Viking Corp., has been an unassuming philanthropist in the community. His list of activities includes being a trustee with Hastings Area School System, Pennock Hospital and the National Bank of Hastings.

Gross, who is wintering in Florida and was unavailable for comment Thursday, served as chairman of this year's United Way campaign.

"Him being chairman of this year's campaign, he wanted to make this gift as the capstone of his investment," said his son, Tom Gross. "He didn't want to announce the gift until the end of the annual drive for fear of putting a damper on their campaign celebration."

This year's campaign raised \$529,879, nearly \$23,000 more than last year, Forbes said. The top three corporate donors were Hastings Mutual Insurance (\$66,784), Viking Corp. (\$64,990) and Buckland Insurance Co. (\$4,700).

# Fundraising efforts help area homeless

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, January 20, 2006

By Melissa Burden

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FLINT- Flint Central High School's National Honor Society received \$500 Wednesday for its efforts in selling 350 "Gotta Home?" bracelets after winning the High School Challenge, an organizer said.

High schools across the area were invited to participate in the challenge, orchestrated by the Committee Concerned with Housing, a local nonprofit group that addresses housing issues and homelessness.

Students sold the rubber bracelets for \$2 each to help raise money for the prevention of homelessness. The committee needs to raise funds to match a \$25,000 challenge grant.

Montrose High School took second place in the challenge and received \$300, while Swartz Creek High School finished third and received \$200, said Marcus Fisher, a committee member and a Local Initiatives Support Corp. AmeriCorps community organizer with the Flint Neighborhood Improvement and Preservation Project.

The bracelets are available at Regis Salon in Genesee Valley shopping center in Flint Township and at the University of Michigan-Flint campus bookstore in the UM-Flint pavilion, Fisher said.

# Mail donations help Salvation Army top goal

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, January 20, 2006

By George Jaksa

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FLINT - Salvation Army campaigners have reason to celebrate today.

After falling short of its 2005 Christmas Red Kettle fund drive target, the Salvation Army's individual post-Christmas contributions shot the overall campaign goal of \$600,000 over the top, Capt. John Williams, commander of the Genesee County campaign, reported to the agency's advisory board Thursday.

With mail donations still coming in, Williams reported that the campaign tallied \$623,796, 103 percent of its goal.

It compares favorably with the 2004 total of \$638,024, held during better economic times locally and before an Asian tsunami and hurricanes in the United States.

"Overall, we are very pleased," said Williams, "and reaching 103 percent of our goal as of Jan. 13, also makes us happy.

"We are particularly celebrating the fact that this year we spent \$30,731 less on our campaign compared with last year."

The savings resulted from attracting more volunteers to man kettles. Last year, expenses reached \$144,000.

The local Salvation Army unit distributed food and toys to 3,604 individuals, or 989 families, also more than 2004. The agency distributed 1,255 boxes of food purchased through the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan with a value of \$450,000

# STATEWIDE PAY RAISE

Thursday, January 19, 2006

By CRYSTAL HARMON  
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

Rick Revette hadn't heard about a push by Democrats and others to get Michigan's minimum wage increased, but the Bay City restaurant owner says it would be hardship to start paying waitresses and other employees more.

The proposal would bump the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.85, and increase the pre-tip wage for waitresses from \$2.65 to \$4.35.

"That's quite a jump," said Revette, who owns Mulligan's Pub and Gatsby's Saloon. "The only way I could recoup that would be to raise my prices, and I hate to do that because it's very competitive now."

Marsha Perez sees the other side of the coin.

Perez, a single mom studying at Delta College to become a registered nurse, said a minimum wage increase would help her and others who are struggling to improve their financial status.

"I think it would be really good for me and other people I know," said Perez, of Bay City.

Supporters of the proposal hope to collect enough signatures by June to put the question on the November ballot.

If the efforts to get 320,000 valid signatures are successful, voters will decide Nov. 7 whether to raise the current minimum wage to \$6.85 effective Jan. 1, 2007.

The new minimum wages would be boosted each year based on inflation, under provisions of the ballot initiative.

John Freeman, a former state representative from Madison Heights, is directing the efforts of Michigan Needs a Raise, the committee formed to put the issue on the ballot.

Volunteers from organizations such as the AFL-CIO, the United Auto Workers and various churches around Detroit began collecting petition signatures last week.

"We want to value hard work, and we want to help people work their way out of poverty," Freeman said. "It's almost better being on welfare than working to support their families and themselves."

Also, Freeman said, the increase would boost the overall state economy.

"If people are making more money, they're not going to save this money," Freeman said. "They're going to turn around and spend it on their families and themselves at the very same businesses that are worried about having to pay their employees a higher wage."

But some small-business owners fear that a mandated higher minimum wage would be another blow to establishments that are already struggling to stay vital in Michigan's weak economic climate.

Revette said he starts his wait staff at \$2.75 per hour, and having to pay servers \$4.75 would be "drastic."

With tips, he said, waitresses traditionally have made more than minimum hourly wage, although tight financial times have, in some cases, meant fewer customers and perhaps smaller tips.

"I definitely think they could use an increase, but if we get too carried away, we'll have to raise prices or cut staff, and either choice wouldn't have a very good outcome," Revette said.

An estimated 400,000 Michigan workers now earn less than the proposed \$6.85 minimum. Perez is one of them. Her work-study job at Delta, as a receptionist in the tutoring center, started out at \$5.50 per hour, and now pays \$6.50 per hour.

She works 20 hours a week, and said that even a small raise would add up for someone like herself, a full-time student with two children.

"I think it would help a lot," said Perez, 24, adding that she would be willing to sign a petition to put the question to voters and would vote in favor of the increase if it winds up on the November ballot.

The last time the minimum wage was increased in Michigan was in 1997, when it was raised from \$4.75 to the current \$5.15, which is the federally mandated minimum.

The Michigan House of Representatives recently voted down a Senate bill to increase the state's minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.15.

To join the petition drive, call Freeman at (313) 655-7945.

- Crystal Harmon writes about consumer affairs for The Times. She may be reached at 894-9643 or by e-mail at [charmon@bc-times.com](mailto:charmon@bc-times.com).



Friday, January 20, 2006

The Detroit News

Mark Gaffney

## **Michigan's jobless deserve a raise**

### **Increasing and extending benefit helps unemployed weather economy**

**B**ig business and some Republicans recently criticized the Michigan House Democrats for proposing to raise the unemployment benefit from \$362 per week to \$408 and extend it for 13 additional weeks.

But raising the payment is the right thing to do. It provides temporary relief to workers who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own so they can focus on a job search while continuing to feed their families. It puts money in the hands of the unemployed, giving them some purchasing power and dignity.

In times of recession and economic downturn, these benefits counter an overall loss in purchasing power by the public that ultimately would endanger even more jobs. It also helps keep a temporarily laid-off skilled worker from moving out of the state, so when a business is ready to hire or rehire, it can choose from a pool of candidates with the best possible skills and training right here in Michigan.

A recent Detroit News editorial stated that Michigan's top unemployment benefit is third highest in the Midwest and that the House Democrats plan would raise the state's benefit to one of the highest in the region. It contended that ultimately this would be a business-breaker, forcing even more workers on the unemployment rolls.

State benefit isn't high

At best, these arguments are misleading.

The \$362 benefit figure is Michigan's highest possible benefit that a worker can receive. But only about 60 percent of those men and women receiving benefits are getting the maximum. Others receive a rate based upon their pay rate while employed and all possible increases for dependants.

Now, looking at the \$362 maximum benefit figure, let's look at other states' maximum benefit, comparing apples to apples.

According to Michigan's Department of Labor and Economic Growth and the U.S. Department of Labor, 26 other states had higher maximum benefits last year -- and many will likely see raises this year.

Pennsylvania's maximum benefit was \$486 and has risen to \$497, while North Carolina's is \$442. In our region, Minnesota is at \$515, Illinois \$456, Ohio \$446 and Indiana \$390.

Pro-business, Chamber of Commerce types will, of course, call any unemployment insurance increase a job-killing tax. After all, unemployment insurance programs, which were established under the Social Security Act of 1935, impose a tax on an employer's payroll of four or more workers.

Employer tax is modest

But it is important to look at exactly how much money we are talking about. The average premium or tax paid by employers for this insurance benefit last year was only \$5.88 per week per employee, according to the Department of Labor and Economic Growth. It was not even in the double digits.

The money isn't wasted. Ninety percent of the revenue from the tax is returned directly to the workers; the remainder is used for administrative purposes.

The current proposal is not the first time that Michigan has looked at raising unemployment benefits, nor has it only been brought up by Democrats. Four years ago, the Republican House speaker called for the maximum benefit to be raised to \$400. Is proposing a 2 percent higher increase four years later unreasonable?

Extended payout temporary

The second issue of a 13-week extension for unemployment benefits is also critical. With the tough economy we face today, 13 extra weeks is a necessary extra step. Last year 98,000 working men and women would have been eligible for the extension after exhausting their benefits.

When drafting the legislation, the House Democrats were astute enough to include a trigger that will cease providing the additional 13 weeks when the state unemployment rate drops below 5 percent and it becomes easier for a displaced worker to find a job.

This will save businesses money in the future.

Trigger saves firms money

And it will help workers who, just like you and I, are responsible for a household's well-being and whose dependents are children, who need to be fed and clothed regardless of a job situation and regardless if someone's allotted 26 weeks are up.

Let's be clear: A worker is a human being. When workers lose a job through no fault of their own in a difficult economy, they deserve to collect a meaningful unemployment benefit. Raising and extending that benefit, which is pretty average compared with other states' benefits, is the least the Legislature can do.

*Labor Voices Mark Gaffney is president of the Michigan AFL-CIO, a federation of Michigan labor groups. Mail letters to The Detroit News, Editorial Page, 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226, or fax them to (313) 222-6417 or e-mail them to [letters@detnews.com](mailto:letters@detnews.com).*

## Labor Voices

Labor Voices columns are written for The News on a rotating basis by United Auto Workers President Ron Gettelfinger, Teamster President James Hoffa, Michigan AFL-CIO President Mark Gaffney and Michigan Education Association President Lu Battaglieri. The News hopes to provide a forum for discussing workplace issues that are critical to a large segment of Michigan's population, whether or not they are union members. Look for Labor Voices every Friday in The Detroit News.